

The Good Samaritan as Metaphor for Ministry

Maggie Wellert and Margaret Leinbach

Our purpose here is to initiate a dialogue within the larger Moravian world concerning ministry relationships between pastors and congregations. We bring to the conversation over fifty years of active adult lay involvement in church life. Laywomen are the majority in most churches, but the voices of women have been silent and silenced in formulating relationship models between laity and clergy.¹

We were born into and raised families in the church. We've each held leadership roles, behind-the-scenes roles, taught Sunday School, served on countless committees, and been the recipient of both helpful and harmful pastoral care. One of us (Maggie) has experienced first hand the destructiveness of the shepherd model on a congregation and the destructiveness of the servant model in the lives of a pastor and his family.

We begin by critiquing two traditional metaphors for ordained ministry, the pastor as Shepherd and the pastor as Servant, and then we offer a "new" metaphor of the Good Samaritan. The foundations for this metaphor are the commission of Jesus to love God and neighbor, the priesthood of all believers, and the model of relationship we see in the triune nature of God. We recognize that all models of, and metaphors for, Christian ministry must be grounded in scripture.

The metaphorical language that we use in speaking about lay and ordained ministry has a great deal to do with how we understand

those ministries. More than that, metaphors help refine how we think about things and define how we perceive the world around us. Since metaphors both highlight and hide what they seek to describe, it is important for us periodically to review our root metaphors with new eyes. Do they continue to define us as we are? Is there a "dark side" to the metaphors that is at work but is largely ignored? Do they need a reworking or should we search for new metaphors that excite our imagination and call us to new understanding?²

The Pastor as Shepherd or Servant

The pastor as shepherd of the congregational "flock of sheep" is steeped in Protestant Christian tradition. The word "pastor" means shepherd. The minister stands in for Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and follows Christ's command to Peter to "feed my sheep." Shepherds lead their sheep, and thus must be "ahead" of them looking out for their welfare. Sheep "listen" to the shepherd's voice because of the shepherd's authority and care, and are united under his or her care and guidance. The shepherd knows the sheep by name and they respond to the shepherd's voice. The shepherd is even prepared to lay down his or her life for the sheep.³

Shepherd and sheep are irreconcilably different, and their relationship is hierarchical by necessity. Sheep are creatures of limited vision and limited intelligence. They must be led to quenching waters and verdant pastures.

Vulnerable and weak, they need protection from the wild creatures of their world. Without the watchful care and attentiveness of a shepherd, the sheep will not survive for long. In this metaphor for ministry, the human pastor/shepherd is called to emulate Jesus, the fully human and fully divine Son of God. Congregations, though equally made in God's image, become needy creatures and objects of the pastor's ministry.

Pastor as servant is also grounded in Scripture. Jesus declares, "I came not to be served but to serve,"⁴ and he commanded, "whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all."⁵ The pastor looks to the life of Jesus for the model of servanthood. Ministry is to sinners, the sick, and others who are poor and needy. The pastor is obedient to the call of the Master and ready to emulate Christ's example of self-sacrifice and obedience to God.

When the pastor is focused on service, doing is far more significant than being. Faithfulness to call is measured by how well the servant performs tasks. The number of pastoral visits, the growth in members and, budget, programs and the square footage of the church complex are standards measuring success. Focusing on these standards encourages putting aside of one's own (and family's) legitimate needs in order to serve others. Servanthood can go too far by preventing the ongoing care of pastors' physical and mental health because servants must focus first on the needs of those they serve.

In the changing culture around us, these ministry metaphors have a shadow side that we normally do not explore: the abuse of

power. In the shepherd model the pastor is invited to operate from "above." As a servant, the pastor is expected to operate from "below" with little regard for his or her own needs. These metaphors define our reality by encouraging over-functioning by the pastor and under-functioning by the laity.

Each of these metaphors grows out of Jesus' ministry. Yet for Jesus the roles were carried out in the context of a complete gospel message, not only understanding, but living out God's love and power through the cross. This is not power as control, but power as life as seen in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, a truly counter-cultural notion for our communities of faith.

Power as life issues invitations, offers cooperation, is relational, incarnational, and life giving.⁶ Sally Purvis suggests this means we are to be about the business of "loving each other into being in the context of trust and accessibility within a culture of hospitality that affirms life in partnership with God."⁷ Jesus tells his disciples in John's gospel, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you."⁸ What metaphor encompasses this kind of relationship with God and one another? We suggest a metaphor for mutual ministry.

Mutual Ministers

Our premise is that the pastor is set within the congregation as one who empowers the priesthood of all believers, the ministry of all. The pastor is not set apart as shepherd or servant, nor is the pastor "other than" laity. Rather, the pastor comes from God's people

to preach the word and administer the sacraments. Scripture itself does not draw a distinction between lay and ordained ministry. The people of God are all ministers called into ministry.

The heart and soul of all ministry, for pastor and other members of the parish, are relationships of love. Love is deeply relational. We know this because God is love and the Triune God is relational. "God is not a solitary monad," writes theologian Daniel Migliore. God exists in a community of equals united in mutual love. Within the Trinity, God models communal relationship where power is mutual and collaboratively used for love's end. Since God is the source of all life, we understand love to be life giving. Love creates. Love redeems. Love transforms life in ways that are healthy and holistic.⁹

In mutual relationships life-giving power is reciprocal and equally shared. One party is not "up" (shepherd) or "down" (servant) in a controlling relationship to the other. In mutual relationships there is a holy joining together in a shared experience that enhances the life of both (or all) people involved in the relationship. As *The Ground of Our Unity* states: "He joins us together mutually so that knowing ourselves to be members of His body we become willing to serve each other."¹⁰ How do we serve in ways that are mutually life-giving to both the server and the person being served? Service is not the same as love, but it can be an expression of love.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus affirms the lawyer's answer that "to inherit eternal life" one must love God and love the neighbor as oneself. Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate how we love one

another.¹¹ Unlike the priest and the Levite, the Good Samaritan allowed himself to be distracted from his immediate goal. He responded to the situation before him to facilitate the healing of the injured man. Though he stopped to tend to the need of the other man, he did not lose sight of his own journey, but continued on his path, changed by his willingness to encounter his neighbor in need. He empowered a connection between the wounded man and a caretaker, entrusting his care to the innkeeper and holding the innkeeper accountable for a report on the Samaritan's return journey. God calls us, clergy and laity, to do the same.

Good Samaritan ministry embodies the priesthood of all believers. It puts the emphasis first on the quality of the relationships we have with God (Sabbath time) and with one another. Good Samaritan ministers are grounded in a sense of self and a sense of relationship with God and others that fosters clear, healthy boundaries and accountability. They accurately perceive the reality of situations and are willing to risk an invitation to relationship. Their wisdom elicits good questions rather than solutions, empowering others to find answers. Good Samaritan ministers facilitate environments of trust and vulnerability within congregations so that diverse ideas and opinions are sought and safely voiced, information is readily available to all members, and the inevitable conflict of living in community is dealt with in ways in which healing and reconciliation occur. This is no easy call for human beings who are broken and vulnerable.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Clearly there is much that is comforting and comfortable with the metaphors of pastor as

shepherd or servant. We believe that it is time to acknowledge there is also something about these metaphors that is disturbing. Pastoral Care may be a term for ministry that we should put aside in favor of Community Care.¹² We are all part of a community on the path to healing. Margaret Kornfeld writes, "In community, people learn to know themselves when they are perceived by others who really want to know them. Through their experience of being known, people often become greater than they thought it possible to be."¹³ We believe that the metaphor of both pastor and laity as Good Samaritan offers the community a new way to perceive healing and growth. It invites all members of the community to grow into the people God calls them to be. Yet we also recognize that we "see through a mirror dimly." More imagination, experience and discussion of this metaphor as a model for ministry with men and women in all capacities of church life is needed to birth and live ways of relating to one another, which are life-giving and thereby build up the Body of Christ.

Margaret Leinbach is a second-year Divinity student at Wake Forest University. A retired lawyer and C.P.A., she is a member of the Peace Moravian congregation in Charlotte. Margaret currently serves as chair of the Spiritual Life Committee for the Provincial Women's Board, and is a member of the Interprovincial Women's Board and the Spiritual Growth Commission for the Southern Province. She has been a trainer for six years for Gemeinschaft II, vice-chair of Elders at Peace, synod delegate, and chair of the Church and Society Commission between the 1995 and 1998 synods. She and her husband,

Ted Leinbach, are the parents of two daughters.

Rev. Maggie Wellert is pastor of Our Savior's Moravian Church in Altura, Minn. and Berea Moravian Church in St. Charles, Minn.. She is called to team ministry with her husband, Rev. Keith Harke. She received the MATS and M.Div. degrees from Moravian Theological Seminary. She has served the church as pastor's wife, Joint Board member, officer in women's ministries, director of various congregational educational ministries, visitation pastor, Coordinator of Parish Ministries, and Pastoral Assistant. She is the mother of three adult children who live in Pennsylvania.

¹ See Elisabeth Schussler-Fioenza, Women Invisible in Society and Church (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), p. 14.

² For a detailed look at metaphor in the church, we suggest Robert Kysar, Stumbling in the Light: New Testament Images for a Changing Church (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

³ John 21: 15-19, John 10: 1-18. John 21: 15-19. See also Thomas C. Oden, Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry (New York: Harper Collins, 1983), ch. 5, "Shepherding as Pivotal Analogy."

⁴ Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28.

⁵ Mark 10:43-44, Matthew 20: 26-27.

⁶ Sally Purvis, The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), pp. 37-49.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸John 15: 15.

⁹See Daniel Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), ch. 4, "The Triune God."

¹⁰The Ground of Our Unity, a doctrinal statement adapted by the Unity Synod of the Unitas Fratrum, or Moravian Church, The Belief of the Church.

¹¹Jeanne Moessner Stevenson, "From Samaritan to Samaritan : Journey Mercies," in Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care, ed. by J. S. Moessner, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1996).

¹² See Margaret Kornfeld, Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities (New York: Continuum, 1998).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.